MANUEL RAMIREZ III

THE THERAPIST



Multicultural Psychotherapy

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Most psychotherapy and counseling models ignore the powerful impact that the therapist's personality has on the outcome of therapy. Witkin and Goodenough (1977) showed that the preferred cognitive style of therapists was reflected in their therapeutic styles. For example, therapists who were preferred field independent tended to talk less and to be less directive in therapy than were their field sensitive colleagues.

The cultural styles of therapists have also been found to be important in mental health service delivery for the "different" (Torrey, 1973; Sue and Zane, 1987; Sue and Sue, 1990). When therapist and client share the same cultural worldview and the same values, therapy is more effective.

Research by Lubrosky and colleagues (1985) showed that the therapist is much more than just the transmitter of a standard therapeutic approach: The mental health professional is actually an important independent agent of change, with the ability to magnify or reduce the effects of therapy. These authors found that an early intreatment measure of the patient-therapist relationship, the Helping Alliance Questionnaire, yielded significant correlation with outcome measures. The researchers concluded, that "the best, i.e., most effective therapists, were those who also happened to form the better helping alliances with their patients" (p. 608).

Thus, it could be concluded that a cultural and cognitive styles match between therapist and client is likely to enhance the development of the therapeutic alliance. Therefore, focus on the therapist's preferred styles and on the degree of match between the cognitive and cultural styles of the therapist and the client are of central importance to the multicultural model of psychotherapy. When the therapist matches the client, mismatch shock and the feeling of being different can be reduced. This increases the client's trust and feelings of self-efficacy, which in turn increases the willingness to explore diversity and to learn from it by opening up learningexperience filters.

This chapter focuses on the preferred cultural and cognitive

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styles of the therapist. Further, it examines the degree to which the therapist can and should flex in order to match the client and serve as a multicultural model.

THE THERAPIST AS A PRODUCT OF HISTORY

The therapist's preferred cultural and cognitive styles and degree of flex have been shaped by personal history, vis-à-vis diversity. Thus, therapists need a systematic approach for determining how their preferred styles and ability to flex have been shaped by socialization and life experiences. One technique for learning this is through a self life history.

The Self Life History

The following sample questions can serve as a general guideline for developing a self life history:

 How much cognitive and cultural diversity was reflected in the make-up of my nuclear and extended families? Were parents, blood relatives, and relatives by marriage with whom I interacted extensively as a child or an adolescent members of different ethnic, racial, religious, regional, or socioeconomic groups? Did they represent different values (as reflected in the different value dimensions listed on Chapter 3), ideologies, and philosophies of life? Did they represent different cognitive style preferences as reflected in their jobs or professions and in their preferred communication, teaching, and learning/ problem-solving styles?

- How cognitively and culturally diverse were the countries, communities, and neighborhoods where I grew up and in which I have lived?
- How diverse were the student and staff populations of the schools I attended?
- How diverse were the teachers, clergy members, mentors, employers, and other influential authority figures?
- How diverse were the people I dated or those I considered to be close friends?
- How diverse were the places—homes, communities, regions, countries—I visited?
- How much diversity was reflected in the courses I had in college and in graduate school? in the novels, biographies, and autobiographies I have read?
- How much diversity is represented in my hobbies and

pastimes?

• What is the nature and the frequency of the diversity challenges I have undertaken?

By answering questions like these, the therapist can gain insight into personal attitudes toward diversity. These questions also help to inventory the size and heterogeneity of the pool of personality resources (see Chapter 3) the therapist has available for cultural and cognitive flex in therapy and counseling.

In addition to the self life history, therapists can do selfassessments of their preferred cultural and cognitive styles and of the degree of their capability to flex in these two domains. The assessment instruments described in the following sections and provided in the appendices of this book can be used for this purpose.

Self-Assessment of Cultural Flex

The therapist can evaluate her cultural flex with several instruments. The Multicultural Experience Inventory (MEI, <u>Appendix A</u>) is a tool that can be used for the assessment of cultural flex. This instrument provides an indication of the degree of exposure the therapist has had to diversity in the past, as well as to the degree to which she is exposed to diversity in the present.

The Traditionalism-Modernism Inventory (TMI, <u>Appendix B</u>) assesses the degree of identification with traditional and modern values and belief systems. This instrument yields a score indicating the degree of agreement with traditional or modern values, as well as indicating the degree of flexibility—that is, the degree of identification with both sets of values and belief systems.

The TMI, the Family Attitude Scale (FAS, <u>Appendix C</u>), and the Multicultural Experience Inventory (Appendix A) can be used in still another way to assess the therapist's degree of cultural flex. Immediately after concluding a therapeutic session, the therapist can review the items of the instruments and identify those that were related to interpretations she made in the course of a therapy session. The therapist can also check her responses to the items with those made by the client to gauge their degree of match or mismatch.

Self-Assessment of Cognitive Flex

Therapists are also encouraged to assess their cognitive style

preference and the degree to which they can flex cognitively by doing a self-assessment with the Therapist's Cognitive Styles Observation Checklist (<u>Appendix D</u>) and with the Bicognitive Orientation to Life Scale (BOLS, <u>Appendix G</u>).

The Therapist's Cognitive Styles Observation Checklist is used in much the same way as the Cognitive Styles Observation Checklist that is described in Chapter 7. Table 6.1 describes the field sensitive and field independent therapist behaviors that have been identified. By keeping this instrument in front of them during the course of therapy, therapists can monitor personal behaviors frequently used in the sessions and then check these against observations made of the client's behavior. A comparison of the two identifies areas of match and mismatch.

The BOLS (<u>Appendix G</u>) assesses the degree of preference for field independent or field sensitive cognitive styles as well as the degree of cognitive flex.

TABLE 6.1 Field Sensitive and Field Independent Behaviors

Field Sensitive

Field Independent

Communication Style

| 1. The therapist does more talking than the client during the session. | 1. The therapist talks less than the client during the session. |
|--|---|
| 2. The therapist personalizes communications; is self-disclosing. | 2. The therapist remains a "blank screen" for the client. |
| 3. The therapist uses both verbal and nonverbal modes of communication. | 3. The therapist emphasizes verbal communication. |
| Interpersonal Relationship Style | |
| 1. The therapist is informal and establishes a close personal relationship with the client. | 1. The therapist is formal and maintains a "professional" distance. |
| 2. The therapist focuses on the nature of the therapist-client relationship in therapy. | 2. The therapist emphasizes self- reliance and is problem-focused. |
| Motivational Styles | |
| 1. The therapist emphasizes social rewards to the client. | 1. The therapist emphasizes self- rewards. |
| 2. The therapist emphasizes achievement for others as one of the goals of therapy. | 2. The therapist emphasizes achievement for self. |
| Therapeutic Teaching Styles | |
| 1. The therapist becomes a model for the client in teaching new behaviors, values, and perspectives. | 1. The therapist uses the discovery approach. |
| 2. The therapist uses reflection, | 2. The therapist uses direct |

encouraging clients to arrive at their own interpretations.

interpretation.

3. The therapist uses a deductive approach (global to specific) to teaching in therapy.

3. The therapist uses an inductive(specific to global) approach to teaching in therapy.

BECOMING A FLEXIBLE THERAPIST

It is important for the therapist to keep in mind that cultural and cognitive flex are processes, not fixed personality characteristics. Therefore, therapists should consider themselves as always being in the process of moving toward, but never reaching, the goal of total cognitive and cultural flexibility.

Because flexibility is constantly in process, it is important for therapists to work continuously toward the development of cultural and cognitive flex by using some of the same procedures and techniques they use with their clients. These will be described in more detail in Chapters 7, 8,9, and 11, but they are introduced here with a brief discussion focusing on development of therapists' flexibility.

Empathy

Viewing the world through the eyes of someone whose cultural and/or cognitive style is different from the therapist's is an exercise for developing flex. The procedure that can be used is what is referred to as *empathy projection*—trying to understand the point of view and the feelings of someone whose values and cognitive styles may differ from those of the therapist.

A good place to start is with loved ones, family members, friends, and colleagues whose values and cognitive styles are different from the preferred styles of the therapist. Another approach is to read the biographies and autobiographies of people whose cultures and values are different from the preferred styles of the therapist. (A list of biographies, autobiographies, and novels written by authors of various ethnic or racial groups is included in Selected Readings at the end of this book.)

Scriptwriting and Role-Playing

Focusing on someone they know well, therapists should develop scripts that attempt to match that person, role-play the script with friends, and then try out the script with the person whom they want to match. After trying out the script, therapists can evaluate themselves by using the Homework Effectiveness Assessment Instrument described in Chapter 8, and provided in <u>Appendix H</u>, and by reviewing the categories of the Cognitive Styles Observation Checklist (see Appendices <u>D</u> and <u>E</u>). Therapists can then rewrite the script and make another attempt if necessary.

Modeling

Therapists can make changes in their friendship patterns in order to have opportunities to interact with people who have cognitive and cultural styles different from their own. By observing and then modeling the behaviors and values they observe and by attempting to communicate and relate effectively to these new friends, therapists can learn unfamiliar cognitive and cultural styles.

Diversity Challenges

Therapists can try out new tasks and activities or hobbies to create diversity challenges. Making new friendships can also stimulate the development of cultural and cognitive style flex.

Travel

Therapists can broaden cultural and cognitive horizons by visiting different neighborhoods or communities in their immediate area, as well as by traveling to different regions or countries in order to gain familiarity with other lifestyles and perspectives on life.

LIMITS TO THERAPIST FLEX

There are limits to the extent to which the therapist should attempt to flex in order to match clients: Every therapist has an effectiveness-comfort range of flex within which she can match clients while feeling comfortable, genuine, and effective. There are limits imposed by moral and ethical considerations—it would not be appropriate to match the client in situations in which matching would reinforce the client's pathology.

The Effectiveness-Comfort Range

Each therapist needs to become familiar with her effectivenesscomfort range through experience and self-evaluation. The greater the diversity of the therapist's caseload, the greater the opportunities for self-evaluation under different conditions of match. Therapists should take the issues in the following sections into consideration when determining the extent of their effectiveness-comfort range.

Therapy Goals. The therapist needs to be cognizant of the match requirements of the goals that have been established for the client. The therapist, through experience, comes to recognize that certain client goals require complete shifts in style during the course of therapy: A client who is suffering from a posttraumatic stress disorder, for example, may require a field sensitive match in the initial stages and a predominant field independent orientation in the later stages of therapy. Thus, when the therapist and client develop the goals of therapy in the second session, the therapist needs to decide whether she will have the required range of flex to meet the client's needs during the entire course of treatment. If the demands required by the therapeutic plan cannot be met, then the therapist must be prepared to refer the client to another professional who might have the range of flex required to work effectively with that client.

Limit-Setting and Confrontation. Some clients, such as those with borderline and antisocial personality disorders, may require the

establishment of firm limits and the use of confrontation (behavior typical of a field independent therapy orientation) during the course of therapy. Therapists must know if their effectiveness-comfort range will allow them to be comfortable and genuine with limit-setting and confrontation.

Structure. Some clients, such as those with oppositional and conduct disorders, may require a very structured type of therapy— one that is typical of an extreme field independent type of therapeutic style. Therapists must ask themselves how comfortable and effective they can be in employing a structured approach to treatment.

Empathy. Clients who have been physically and/or sexually abused may require strong and deep empathy. Therapists must determine if their effectiveness-comfort range will permit the degree of field sensitive orientation in therapy required by victims of abuse.

Moral and Ethical Issues

The therapist needs to be cognizant of the fact that, in some situations, matching behavior may inadvertently be interpreted by the client as support for pathological behavior. This is particularly difficult in cases in which clients need to establish good rapport with the therapist before they can gain the confidence they need to initiate cognitive and cultural style changes. Matching needs to be done with the clear message to the client that it does not imply approval of values and lifestyles that are potentially damaging to the client or to others.

Another area of therapy in which moral and ethical issues are paramount concerns the degree to which the therapist should encourage the client to develop unfamiliar styles. Clients, like therapists, have ranges of flex within which they feel comfortable at certain stages in their lives. The therapist needs to be aware that at some times in their lives clients may be unable to develop the degree of flex that will lead to perfect balance.

For example, encouraging Imelda in the direction of an extreme modernistic and field independent style could have resulted in the greater alienation of members of her family and her peers. The therapist had to consider that this client was living in a traditional community, emphasizing traditional values and a field sensitive orientation to life. When Imelda leaves her home community for a community more representative of modern values and field

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independent styles, it may become easier for her to further explore the development of the field independent and modernistic domains of her personality. Thus, in determining the degree of flexibility of both therapist and client, it is important not to lose sight of the principal paradigm on which the multicultural model is based—multicultural person-environment fit.

SUMMARY

Therapists, like clients, are the products of their socialization, histories, and life experiences. The multicultural model of psychotherapy requires that the therapist, as well as the client, be cognizant of personal preferred cultural and cognitive styles reflected in behaviors, thinking patterns, and lifestyles.

Therapists are encouraged to do short self life histories and selfassessments using the same instruments they use to assess clients preferred styles and degree of flex. Therapists are also asked to use the same techniques and procedures employed to encourage the development of flex in clients so that they too can develop greater flex and thereby become more effective with a wider variety of clients. There are, however, limits to which the therapist can and should flex to match clients. Therapists should not match the values of clients whose actions clearly threaten the lives or the well-being of themselves or others. It is the therapists who must be the ultimate judges of the limits of their willingness and ability to match certain clients. They need to be aware of how entrenched they are with respect to preferred cognitive and cultural styles. Therapists must know when the demands of match would carry them beyond the range in which they feel comfortable, genuine, and effective.

GLOSSARY

- **Attitude of Acceptance** a nonjudgmental, positive, accepting atmosphere devoid of conformity or assimilation pressures. In therapy this enables the client to express his unique, or true, self.
- **Bicognitive Orientation to Life Scale (BOLS)** a personality inventory composed of items that reflect the degree of preference for field sensitive or field independent cognitive styles in different life domains. Assesses cognitive flex by determining the degree of agreement with items that reflect preference for either field independent or field sensitive cognitive styles. A balance or bicognitive score is also attained.
- **Bicognitive Style** a cognitive style characterized by an ability to shuttle between the field sensitive and field independent styles. Choice of style at any given time is dependent on task demands or situational characteristics. For example, if a situation demands competition, the bicognitive person usually responds in a field independent manner. On the other hand, if the situation demands cooperation, the bicognitive individual behaves in a field sensitive manner. People with a bicognitive orientation also may use elements of both the field sensitive and field independent styles to develop new composite or combination styles.
- **Bicultural/Multicultural Style** a cultural style characterized by an ability to shuttle between the traditional and modern cultural styles. Choice of style at any given time is dependent on task demands or

situational characteristics.

- **Change Agent** a person who actively seeks to encourage changes in the social environment in order to ensure acceptance and sensitivity to all cultural and cognitive styles.
- **Cognitive and Cultural Flex Theory (or Theory of Multicultural Development)** the theory that people who are exposed to socialization agents with positive attitudes toward diversity, participate in diversity challenges, interact with members of diverse cultures, maintain an openness and commitment to learning from others, and are more likely to develop multicultural patterns of behavior and a multicultural identity. People who have developed a multicultural identity have a strong, lifelong commitment to their groups of origin as well as to other cultures and groups.
- **Cognitive Style** a style of personality defined by the ways in which people communicate and relate to others; the rewards that motivate them; their problem-solving approaches; and the manner in which they teach, socialize with, supervise, and counsel others. There are three types of cognitive styles: field sensitive, field independent, and bicognitive.
- **Cultural and Cognitive Flex (Personality Flex)** the ability to shuttle between field sensitive and field independent cognitive styles and modern and traditional cultural styles.
- **Cultural Democracy** (1) a philosophy that recognizes that the way a person communicates, relates to others, seeks support and recognition from his environment, and thinks and learns are products of the

value system of his home and community; (2) refers to the moral rights of an individual to be different while at the same time be a responsible member of a larger society.

- **Cultural Style** an orientation to life related to or based on traditional and modern values or a combination of these values. Assessed by the Traditionalism- Modernism Inventory and the Family Attitude Scale.
- **Diversity Challenges** a catalyst for multicultural development such as cultural and linguistic immersion experiences, new tasks, and activities that encourage the process of synthesis and amalgamation of personality building blocks learned from different cultures, institutions, and peoples.
- **Empathy Projection** the process whereby a person tries to understand the point of view and feelings of others whose cognitive styles and values are different from his own.
- **False Self** the identity developed as a result of attempts to conform to cultural and cognitive styles of authority figures, institutions, and majority cultures.
- **Family Attitude Scale** a personality inventory to assess a person's degree of agreement with traditional and modern family values.
- **Field Independent** a cognitive style characterized by independent, abstract, discovery-oriented learning preferences, an introverted lifestyle, a preference for verbal communication styles, and an emphasis on personal achievement and material gain. People with a preferred field independent orientation are likely to be analytical and

inductive and focus on detail. They also tend to be nondirective and discovery-oriented in childrearing, and in teaching, supervising, and counseling others.

- **Field Sensitive** a cognitive style characterized by interactive personalized learning preferences, an extroverted lifestyle, a preference for nonverbal communication styles, a need to help others. People with a preferred field sensitive orientation tend to be more global, integrative, and deductive in their thinking and problem-solving styles, and they tend to be directive in childrearing, and in teaching, supervising, and counseling others.
- Life History Interview focuses on the development and expressions of cultural flex during different periods of life: infancy and early childhood, early school and elementary school years, middle school years, high school years, and post- high school period. The life history interview also focuses on the extent of an individual's actual participation in both traditional and modern families, cultures, groups, and institutions. The life history identifies the type of cultural flex by examining the degree to which a person has been able to combine modern and traditional values and belief systems to arrive at multicultural values and worldviews.
- **Match and/or Mismatch** refers to person-environment fit with respect to the degree of harmony or lack of harmony between cultural/cognitive styles and environmental demands. Two types are cognitive mismatch and cultural mismatch.

Mismatch Shock an extreme case of the mismatch syndrome.

Mismatch Syndrome a lack of harmony between a person's preferred

cultural and/or cognitive styles and environmental demands. This occurs when people feel at odds to the important people and institutions in their lives. They feel alone, hopeless, and misunderstood; they may exhibit a number of symptoms, including self-rejection, depression, negativity, rigidity, and attempts to escape reality.

- **Model** a person whom the client admires and who is dominant in the cultural/ cognitive styles the client wants to learn.
- **Modeling** the process whereby people learn unfamiliar cognitive and cultural styles through imitation and observation of others, through reading and through travel.
- **Modern** a value orientation that emphasizes and encourages separation from family and community early in life. It is typical of urban communities, liberal religions, and of North American and Western European cultures. People who are identified as having a modern value orientation tend to emphasize science when explaining the mysteries of life; they have a strong individualistic orientation; they tend to deemphasize differences in gender and age roles; and they emphasize egalitarianism in childrearing practices.
- **Multicultural Ambassador** a multicultural person who promotes the development of multicultural environments which encourage understanding (multicultural education) and cooperation among different people and groups.
- **Multicultural Educator** a multicultural person who educates others about the advantages of cultural and cognitive diversity and

multicultural orientations to life.

- Multicultural Experience Inventory (MEI) an inventory that assesses historical and current experiences. It focuses on personal history and behavior in three areas: demographic and linguistic, socialization history, and degree of multicultural participation in the past as well as the present. The MEI consists of two types of items: historical (reflecting historical development pattern—HDP) and contemporary functioning (reflecting contemporary multicultural identity—CMI). Includes items that deal with degree of comfort and acceptance.
- **Multicultural Model of Psychotherapy** a model of therapy that emphasizes multicultural development by maximizing the client's ability to flex between cultural and cognitive styles when faced with different environmental demands and development of a multicultural orientation to life characterized by serving as a multicultural educator, ambassador, and peer counselor.
- **Multicultural Peer Counselor** a multicultural person who provides emotional support and facilitates change and development of empowerment in those of his or her peers who are suffering from mismatch.
- **Multicultural Person-Environment Fit Worldview** a worldview that is based on the following assumptions: (1) There are no inferior people, cultures, or groups in terms of gender, ethnicity, race, economics, religion, physical disabilities, region, sexual orientation, or language; (2) problems of maladjustment are the result of mismatch between people, or between people and their

environments rather than of inferior people or groups; (3) every individual, group, or culture has positive contributions to make to personality development and to a healthy adjustment to life; (4) people who are willing to learn from others and from groups and cultures different from their own acquire multicultural building blocks (coping techniques and perspectives), which are the basis of multicultural personality development and multicultural identity; (5) synthesis and amalgamation of personality building blocks acquired from different people, groups, and cultures occur when the person with multicultural potential works toward the goals of understanding and cooperation among diverse groups and peoples in a pluralistic society; and (6) synthesis and amalgamation of personality building blocks from diverse origins contribute to the development of multicultural personality development and psychological adjustment in a pluralistic society.

Preferred Cultural and Cognitive Styles Observation Checklists observational rating scales that list field sensitive and field independent behaviors in five domains: communications; interpersonal relationships; motivation; teaching, parenting, supervising, and counseling; learning and problem solving. The checklists can be used to assess modern and traditional cultural styles and values.

Preferred Styles the dominant cultural and cognitive styles of a person.

Scriptwriting a therapy strategy used, along with role-playing, to promote cultural and cognitive flex development by matching the cultural or cognitive styles of a person or institution.

- **Theory of Multicultural Development** see Cognitive and Cultural Flex Theory.
- **Traditional** a value orientation that emphasizes close ties to family and community throughout life. It is typical of rural communities, conservative religions, and of minority and developing cultures. People identified as having traditional value orientations tend to have a spiritual orientation toward life, are strongly identified with their families and communities of origin, usually believe in separation of gender and age roles; and typically endorse strict approaches to child- rearing.
- Traditionalism-Modernism Inventory (TMI) a personality inventory that assesses the degree of identification with traditional and modern values and belief systems. The instrument yields scores indicating the degree of agreement with items reflecting traditionalism or modernism. The degree of flex can be determined by examining the differences between the total traditionalism and total modernism scores (balance score) as well as by looking at the degree of agreement with the traditional and modern items across the different domains of life: gender-role definition; family identity; sense of community; family identification; time orientation; age status; importance of tradition; subservience to convention and authority; spirituality and religion; attitudes toward issues such as sexual orientation, the death penalty, the role of federal government in education, benefits to single mothers and noncitizens, and abortion. Type of flex can be determined by examining the degree of flex within each domain.

Tyranny of the Shoulds an individual's perception of the self based on what

she believes others expect the person to be like. The pressure to conform could contribute to psychological maladjustment—the individual develops a false self based on the "shoulds" of parents, important others, and societal institutions.

Unique Self a person's preferred cultural and cognitive styles before he has been subjected to the pressures of conformity.

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